



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 29, 2012

House Resolution Seeks Answers on Drone Use

Texas Republican Ron Paul, Ohio Democrat Dennis Kucinich, and New Jersey Democrat Rush Holt are continuing the fight in the House of Representatives against the use of drones for targeted killing by the Obama administration. They have once again called upon the Obama administration to release documents to justify the use of the overseas drone strikes.



According to the two-page “[resolution of inquiry](#)” Attorney General Eric Holder would have to “transmit to the House of Representatives not later than 14 days after the date of the adoption of this resolution, any documents and legal memoranda in the Attorney General’s possession relating to the practice of targeted killing of United States citizens and targets abroad.”

Earlier this year, leaks of classified documents have shed some light on the use of drones, but rather than garnering harsh backlash over some of those counter-terror efforts that were exposed through the leaks, the information only made lawmakers attack what they perceived to be intentional leaks by the Obama administration to bolster his image as a strong anti-terrorist leader. The unconstitutionality, immorality, or illegality of drone use never entered the discussion.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism has reported that drone strikes have killed over 3,000 people, including more than 1,000 innocent civilians, since 2002.

When introducing the legislation to the House, Kucinich acknowledged, “According to a memorandum prepared by the White House Office of Legal Counsel, when the United States conducts such an attack it is legal. The Congress and the American people have a right to know this legal framework. Congress has an obligation as the sole authority under the Constitution to declare war to know how the use of force abroad is being used, especially against U.S. citizens.”

He continued, “Our strikes are creating a legal precedent that the world will emulate. From Iran to China, other nations are very close to developing comparable technology. If Congress doesn’t act to ensure proper oversight and legal authority for the use of this technology, the consequences could be dire for the American people.”

The Obama administration has carried out over 250 covert drone strikes in just three years, five times more than the 44 approved under George W. Bush.

An article by the *New York Times* noted that there are suspicions surrounding Obama’s use of drones:

Mr. Obama has avoided the complications of detention by deciding, in effect, to take no prisoners alive. While scores of suspects have been killed under Mr. Obama, only one has been taken into American custody, and the president has balked at adding new prisoners to Guantanamo.



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In other words, the Obama administration has found a way to circumvent habeas corpus in yet another flagrant disregard for constitutional rights. The *Washington Post* opined, “The problem ... is the assertion of a presidential prerogative that the administration can target for death people it decides are terrorists — even American citizens — anywhere in the world, at any time, on secret evidence with no review.”

Both Kucinich and Paul have asserted that the need for security should not override the Constitutional rights of the American people.

“We must reject the notion that protecting our national security requires revoking the constitutional rights of U.S. citizens. No president can act as judge, jury and executioner, and any attempt to do so is in direct violation of our Constitution, which gives our citizens a right to life and a fair trial,” Kucinich said.

The “resolution of inquiry” is just the latest effort from Kucinich and Paul to combat the use of drones.

In June, Democratic Representative Dennis Kucinich, along with 25 other members of Congress, submitted a critical letter to the White House demanding information on the use of drones.

The [letter](#), signed by 24 Democrats and two Republicans, including Rep. Paul, demanded information on the authorization and use of drone strikes used by the CIA and Joint Special Operations Command. It asked about the “nature of the follow-up that is conducted when civilians are killed or injured ... and the mechanisms that ensure civilian casualty numbers are collected, tracked and analyzed.”

It continued, “The implications of the use of drones for our national security are profound. They are faceless ambassadors that cause civilian deaths, and are frequently the only direct contact with Americans that the targeted communities have. They can generate powerful and enduring anti-American sentiment.”

Significant concerns about drones were raised when White House counter-terrorism advisor John Brennan commented that their use is authorized “if we have a high degree of confidence that the individual being targeted is indeed the terrorist we are pursuing.”

Kucinich has been an outspoken critic of the Obama administration’s handling of the war on terror. Following the assassination (by drone) of U.S. citizen Anwar al-Awlaki, believed to be working with al-Qaeda, Kucinich accused the Obama administration of [assaulting the Constitution. He argued,](#)

The idea that the United States has the ability to summarily execute a US citizen ought to send chills racing up and down the spines of every person of conscience. The fact that our government can set itself up as policeman, prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner, all wrapped into one fatal moment, should cause every person who loves this country to be deeply concerned about the direction we’re going.

Former GOP presidential candidate Ron Paul has made similar assertions, saying the assassination of al-Awlaki may be an [“impeachable offense.”](#)

In fact, the use of drones to assassinate American citizens has compelled a lawsuit from family members of those citizens. The families of Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, his sixteen-year-old son Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, and operative Samir Khan filed a wrongful death [lawsuit](#) in July, citing the murders as unconstitutional.

Fox News reported on the lawsuit, “The complaint, prepared by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), was filed against four senior national security



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officials: Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, CIA Director David Petraeus and senior commanders of the military's Special Operations forces, Adm. William McRaven of the Navy and Lt. Gen. Joseph Votel of the Army."

The complaint focuses on the violations to the Constitution arising from the assassinations of the three men, who were American citizens. Anwar al-Awlaki was born in the state of New Mexico, while his son Abdulrahman was born in Colorado. Khan was a naturalized U.S. citizen whose family lived in Charlotte, North Carolina. Anwar Al-Awlaki and Samir Khan were killed in Yemen on September 30, 2011, while Anwar's son Abdulrahman was killed in a separate drone strike on October 14, 2011.

According to the lawsuit:

The U.S. practice of "targeted killing" has resulted in the deaths of thousands of people, including many hundreds of civilian bystanders. While some targeted killings have been carried out in the context of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, many have taken place outside the context of armed conflict, in countries including Yemen, Somalia, Pakistan, Sudan, and the Philippines.

These killings rely on vague legal standards, a closed executive process, and evidence never presented to the courts.

Perhaps the recently introduced "resolution of inquiry" will help shed light on the legality of the process of using those drones.

Photo of MQ-9 Reaper Unmanned Aerial Vehicle



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